

25X1

Comments by

*Called this to
attention 22 Feb*

attached

25X1

File

15 February 1972

VIET CONG SUBVERSION
AND THE COMING OFFENSIVE

Samuel A. Adams
DDI/SRS

25X1

SECRET

25X1

Viet Cong Subversion
and the Coming Offensive

Summary

Shortly after the US announced its Vietnamization program in 1969, Hanoi adopted a new policy for South Vietnam, designed to allow the Communists to ride out American troop withdrawals. The new policy's main tenets were a shift from big-unit to small-unit warfare, and a sharply increased emphasis on subversion in South Vietnamese government (GVN) territory.

As part of the new strategy, the Central Office of South Vietnam launched an "Accelerated Military Proselyting Campaign" that June. The campaign's long term goal was to prepare for a large-scale subversive struggle within the South Vietnamese military and security establishment. The preparations chiefly consisted of adding to the military proselytors' already extensive agent structure. In early 1969, the proselytors were estimated to have had 20,000 penetrations within the South Vietnamese Army and police.*

*The number was described as a broad order of magnitude. It did not include an estimated 10,000 other agents run by the Viet Cong Security and Military Intelligence services.

Exactly how well the campaign went is hard to say, but captured documents indicate that since it began the Viet Cong have placed many thousands of additional penetrations. A large proportion of the new agents are in the GVN's low-level People's Self Defense Force (PSDF) which was virtually nonexistent in early 1969.

More important than the number of agents is their location. The documents suggest they are much more numerous in the northern half of South Vietnam than the southern. They are particularly plentiful in the key provinces of VC Quang Da (which includes Da Nang City) and Binh Dinh, both prime targets in the Communists' predicted offensive. Similarly, the documents show that other Viet Cong agencies which operate in GVN territory are strong in the northern half of the country. Not the least of the reasons for their success is the fact that until early last year Viet Cong agents headed the National Police Special Branch of GVN I Corps.*

*The Special Branch's main job is to catch Viet Cong subversives.

In the projected offensive, the Viet Cong plan to accompany their military assaults with large-scale subversive action in the GVN rear. At first, the action will be tactically oriented (opening gates, etc.), but if the offensive builds up steam, the subversives will raise their sights in the hope of sparking a "general uprising." Although the military proselytors' main task initially will be to persuade GVN soldiers to remain aloof from the fray, they probably hope eventually to arrange unit defections.

How long the GVN Armed Forces can be expected to hang on in the face of the Communist onslaught will largely depend on the willingness of the average South Vietnamese soldier to resist. The continued and probably increasing ability of Viet Cong proselytors to recruit large numbers of agents in GVN military and security forces suggest the will to resist is none too high. Furthermore, the soldiers, militiamen, and police must realize that their principal backstop in the past -- US infantry -- is no longer there. This realization, combined with the knowledge gained in LAM SON 719 that ARVN's best units were no match for Communist regulars, must raise doubts in many minds whether fighting for the GVN is worth it.

-iii-

SECRET

25X11

Thus the ability of the GVN to withstand a determined Communist offensive in the coming months is in serious doubt. If the Communists succeed in pulling off major victories in the northern half of the country or in Cambodia, they might well be able to generate a sense of momentum in the southern lowlands. If the southern ball gets rolling, the Saigon government could arrive at the brink of collapse even before the US elections.

-iv-

SECRET

25X11

Viet Cong Subversion
and the Coming Offensive

Introduction

This memorandum deals primarily with the role of the Viet Cong military proselyting apparatus in the Communists' coming offensive. It also touches on the capabilities and plans of other Viet Cong subversive organizations operating in South Vietnamese Government (GVN) territory. It updates the DDI memorandums Viet Cong Covert Agencies in South Vietnamese Territory (ER 70-63, May 1970) and Communist Subversion in the South Vietnamese Army and Security Apparatus (ER IM 70-134, September 1970) which inspected the Viet Cong subversives' structure, procedures, and policy. The current study tries to fill in the gap in recent CIA prognoses on the war which have tended to neglect Viet Cong subversion.*

*E.g., CIA Memorandum Enemy Strategy and Capabilities Through May 1972 [redacted]. Its 26 pages fail to mention subversion. See also, The Communist Winter-Spring Offensive in South Vietnam of 7 February 1972 [redacted]

NO FOREIGN DISSEM

Documents captured since late 1970 are the current study's main source. Rallier reports, POW interrogations, and agent reports supplement the relevant documents, of which several hundred were reviewed.

Background

1. The Communist Subversion memorandum of September 1970 noted that the aim of the Viet Cong military proselytors is to sap the zeal and effectiveness of Saigon's armed forces and police. The study guessed that in early 1969 the proselytors had some 20,000 subversive agents in South Vietnamese government (GVN) ranks.*

2. The study observed that in mid-1969 Hanoi designed a new policy for South Vietnam to allow the Communists to ride out US troop withdrawals. It called for a shift from large-unit to small-unit warfare, a transfer of experienced officials from military to political and subversive tasks, and a dispatch of large numbers of cadres from VC to GVN territory.

*It did not include an estimated 10,000 other VC agents in GVN ranks run by the Communist military intelligence and security organizations. The number was a gross estimate which described a spectrum of agents ranging from Communist Party members on one end to fence sitters on the other.

3. As part of the new strategy the Central Office of South Vietnam in June 1969 launched an "Accelerated Military Proselyting Campaign." Fashioned by the Enemy and Military Proselyting Directorate in Hanoi, the campaign's long range goal was to prepare for a large-scale subversive struggle within the South Vietnamese armed forces and police. The preparations for the struggle consisted chiefly of building within the GVN a strategic reserve of clandestine assets. The study suggested that the reserve was for use in a number of contingencies, including "the fall of US troop strengths to levels the Viet Cong believe they can handle."

4. This contingency may have come to pass. Of the 131,000 US soldiers now in South Vietnam, fewer than 20,000 are combat soldiers. Most combatants stand guard.

The Viet Cong Proselyting Effort Since 1969

5. The Viet Cong drive to increase the size of its subversive network within the GVN began in earnest in late 1969. We do not know exactly how well the drive went, but the total number of new penetrations since then has probably reached into the many thousands. (Appendix A displays the evidence behind the assertion.) Many of the

[REDACTED]

new agents were told to lie low as part of the strategic reserve.

6. Nor do we know the overall current size of the military proselyting agent structure. However, documents suggest it is much bigger now than it was in 1969, when the gross estimate of 20,000 was arrived at. Although one might conjecture a current agent total of, say, half again or even double the 1969 figure, a comparison of old and new estimates would be deceiving, since recent reports include a large proportion of Viet Cong agents in the GVN's low-level People's Self Defense Force (PSDF). The PSDF, which has more than half a million armed members, was virtually non-existent in early 1969. (Appendix B lists recent examples of the numbers of agents run by specific echelons at given points in time.)

7. Whatever the overall total, the Enemy and Military Proselyting Directorate probably seldom looks at it, but dwells instead on the proselytors' capacities place by place. The evidence suggests they are much stronger in the northern half of the country than the southern. The two areas in which they seem strongest of all are the VC Quang Da Special Zone (GVN Quang Nam plus Da Nang City) and VC Binh Dinh Province.

8. The evidence from Quang Da is voluminous. It includes large numbers of VC documents, as well as information gotten from local GVN officials. For example, a recent report derived from low-level GVN sources -- who are readier to confess gloom than their superiors -- noted a "serious morale problem among the 62 Regional Forces (RF) companies in Quang Da, "as well as among the ranks of the Popular Forces (PF)." The sources also observed that the RF and PF in most of Quang Da refuse to deploy during the hours of darkness and are extremely reluctant to fight. Recent evidence indicates the Vietnamese Communists intend to place a heavy emphasis on Quang Da in the coming offensive, and may well attack Da Nang in force.*

9. The military proselytors seem as strong in Binh Dinh as they are in Quang Da. Several documents suggest that Binh Dinh's PF is heavily penetrated, and that the Viet Cong have made deep inroads into the province's

*Da Nang airfield seems a particularly lucrative target. As of 4 February, some 350 American aircraft were there, guarded by a brigade from the recently-disbanded Americal Division. The brigade is doing the same job once performed by four infantry regiments of US Marines.

PSDF. (Appendix A lists five examples of agent placement in Binh Dinh. The examples, which give exact numbers, were culled from a much larger selection of documents which didn't.) In addition, certain parts of the B3 Front team with Viet Cong agents. For example, documents from VC Daclac's H5 District -- where the province capital Ban Me Thuot sits -- suggest the enemy has the local PSDF saturated with penetrations, either real or prospective.

10. As noted, the proselytors in the southern half of South Vietnam have done less well. For example, reports from Xuan Loc District in VC Baria-Long Khanh, and from the Soc Trang and Can Tho province capitols suggest the Communists have had a great deal of trouble maintaining their agent structure. Other reports show that many villages in the Delta lack a Communist Party organization altogether. Such villages contain few if any VC agents. But some areas in the Delta still have many penetrations. A document of August 1971 claimed that four villages in VC Ca Mau Province ran 111 agents (that is, an average of 28 each). They included four in the RF, 70 in the PF, and 37 in the PSDF.

11. How well the Viet Cong proselytors have done among South Vietnam Army regular units is hard to document.* In any case, evidence of declining morale in ARVN is easy to uncover. Some reports describe ARVN units refusing to fight. Others show an increasingly high desertion rate, particularly among "elite" units such as the Marines, Rangers, and Paratroopers. Statistics compiled last year indicate a steady decline in present-for-duty strength among ARVN's maneuver battalions. In January 1971 the present-for-duty strength was 67% of authorized strength; by November, it had dropped to 50%. (See Appendix C)

Other Clandestine Assets

12. The military proselyting apparatus is only one of several Viet Cong organizations operating in GVN

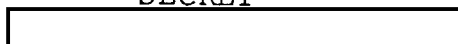
*Captured documents from southern Quang Tri Province show the Viet Cong at one time had large numbers of agents in the 1st Regiment of the First Division, supposedly ARVN's best. The Regiment turned in a mediocre performance during the South Vietnamese incursion into Laos in early 1971, but how much the agents had to do with it is difficult to say. For one thing, their agent handlers, some 50 miles away, could not have had much control of the situation. For another, the agents were probably as intent as the non-agents at dodging Viet Cong bullets.

territory. The others include the Viet Cong Security and Military Intelligence Sections, the Political Struggle Apparatus, and the secret associations of the National Liberation Front (NLF). Unfortunately, little systematic research has been published recently on these parts of the Viet Cong's covert structure, so conjectures on what they can accomplish are only partly informed.

13. The very absence of news on spying by the Communists' Security and Military Intelligence components suggests they are doing satisfactorily. The last major roll-up of high-level Viet Cong agents in the Saigon area occurred in 1969. The arrest about a year ago of three long term Viet Cong penetrations in Da Nang is the only recent example of a GVN success against high-level counter-intelligence targets. Those arrested as VC spies were the chief of the National Police (NP) Special Branch of I Corps, the head of the NP Special Branch of Da Nang City, and the chief of the operations section of the NP Special Branch, also of Dan Nang City.* The Special



25X1



25X1

Branch is that part of the National Police chiefly responsible for running operations against the Viet Cong.

14. The fact that Viet Cong agents ran the I Corps Special Branch leads one to suspect that the Communists were able to introduce large numbers of lower level penetrations into the local GVN security establishment. A recent unpublished study on the VC Security Section of the Quang Da Special Zone (QDSZ) reinforces the suspicion. Largely based on captured documents, the study noted that the Viet Cong had gotten into virtually every GVN security agency in Quang Da, and that between early 1969 and mid-1971 there had been a gradual but steady increase in both the worth and number of its already plentiful assets. Interestingly, the study also observed a steady shift of Security Section cadres from the countryside into Da Nang City.

15. Information on the Security Sections in other areas is spotty, but suggests they, too, are far stronger in the northern half of the country than the southern. For example, documents from Viet Cong Region 10 -- on the Cambodian border above Saigon (see map) -- shows the VC security apparatus was having a hard time as late as

the middle of last year.* On the other hand, reports from such northern provinces as Binh Dinh and Quang Ngai indicate Security Sections there were doing uncommonly well. A recent field report from Binh Dinh noted that the provincial Phoenix program was so riven with VC penetrations that it had almost ceased to function.

16. Widespread but fragmentary information shows that the Communists' Political Struggle apparatus and the NLF's covert agencies are also doing better in the northern tier of provinces than in the southern Delta. Again, Quang Da and Binh Dinh provide the most graphic northern examples. Quang Da's Duy Xuyen District reported that in 1970 its NLF "popular associations" had picked up some 7700 new members, of whom 5,698 (or 74%) were "residents of GVN controlled areas." In a report dated 18 June 1971 Phu My District in Binh Dinh claimed its

*Even so, the size of the Security Sections in Region 10 was several times larger than that suggested in Allied Phoenix statistics purporting to list the number of people in the so-called "Viet Cong Infrastructure (VCI)." Similar underestimates are common. If one uses current definitions, one could come up with a "VCI" two or three times higher than the official estimate of 63,000.

Political Struggle organization -- which is responsible for stirring up trouble in GVN territory -- had 277 village and hamlet cadres, who ran about 200 Political Struggle units containing 275 people. Similar reports are common.

Viet Cong Plans

17. The Viet Cong plan to accompany their military offensive in South Vietnam with large-scale subversive action from within. Some reports talk of sparking "spontaneous uprisings" and "political struggles." Others emphasize military proselyting.

18. Military proselyting plans have both their military and political sides. On the one hand, the proselytors are expected to provide direct military assistance to the frontal assaults of the Communist Army. On the other hand, they are supposed to help the Viet Cong political apparatus stir "uprisings" in GVN territory. Far from clear in detail, captured directives seem to envisage preparatory, tactical, and follow-up phases.

19. The preparatory phase began some time ago. It consists of alerting agent assets (probably

including a good part of the strategic reserve), of making last-minute approaches to the myriad of casual contacts the Viet Cong have within the GVN, and of generating an atmosphere of foreboding and malaise. Current evidence on eleventh-hour appeals to GVN waverers is hard to come by, but if the Viet Cong are repeating their performance of Tet 1968, the number of direct approaches to GVN officials of all ranks must now reach into the many tens of thousands.* Furthermore, Viet Cong propaganda has never been more transparent. Normally secretive to the point of paranoia, the Communists have trumpeted their offensive so loudly that they appear to be waging a war of nerves.** Hanoi's Enemy and Military Proselyting Directorate has added to the din by broadcasting detailed appeals to each of the various segments of the South Vietnamese force structure. A recent broadcast

*In early 1968, the military proselytors made pitches at such officials as the chief of ARVN's Joint General Staff, the head of ARVN Ordnance in Saigon, and the province and district chiefs of GVN Binh Dinh Province.

**For example, a report of 14 February indicates the Communist propagandists in Phu Cat District of Binh Dinh have been mounting soapboxes in GVN-controlled hamlets to extol the coming "general offensive."

promised that GVN officials "who redeem their crimes with meritorious services will be rewarded according to their merits."

21. The tactical phase is planned to coincide with the military assaults. In some areas, the Fifth Column will be used to guide assault units, open gates, cut wires, and blow up bunkers. In others, the documents claim it will attempt to "seize control" of the PSDF.* Its most common function, however, will be an effort to convince South Vietnamese soldiers and policemen to stand aloof from the fray. On the political side, the Fifth Columnists will attempt to get ARVN dependents to join the "political struggle" in the GVN's rear.

22. The follow-up phase, about which most evidence is circumstantial, will probably depend on how well the offensive goes. If it begins to build up steam, the military proselytors will reinforce success with new assets -- probably some from the strategic reserve, others from the security and military intelligence

*Captured documents state the Communists already "control" large numbers of PSDF units. What "control" means is unclear, although the evidence shows the Viet Cong have concentrated on recruiting PSDF leaders.

networks. The agents will be employed as the situation warrants. If an area seems about to crumble, for example, they will try to get the local GVN commanders to defect with their units. If an area gives the appearance of surviving, they will employ the confusion to place new agents. In any case, VC documents foresee an increasingly bold use of GVN prisoners and defectors. Some will be recruited directly into Viet Cong Local Force units without the customary stint in "thought reform" camps. Others will be used to garrison newly "liberated" territory. If a large-scale deterioration begins to develop the Communists could conceivably turn whole GVN units around and employ them against their fellows.

Prospects

23. Long range prospects for the GVN are grim. The main question is how long the South Vietnamese Armed Forces can be expected to hang on in the immediate future. The answer lies not only in the intensity of the coming attacks by the Communist Army, but also in the willingness of the average South Vietnamese soldier or policeman to resist.

24. The continued and probably increasing ability of Viet Cong proselytors to recruit large numbers of agents in GVN military and security establishment suggest the will to resist is none too high. Furthermore, the soldiers, militiamen, and police must realize that their principal backstop in the past -- US infantry -- is no longer there. This realization, combined with the knowledge gained in LAM SOM 719 that ARVN's best units were no match for Communist regulars, must raise doubts in many minds whether fighting for the GVN is worth it.

25. The Communists are clearly prepared to take advantage of a deteriorating situation if one develops. The evidence shows they have succeeded in maintaining a large subversive network in the northern half of the country (particularly the key provinces of VC Quang Da and Binh Dinh), and a respectable apparatus in most areas in the south.

26. Thus the ability of the GVN to withstand a determined Communist offensive in the coming months is in serious doubt. If the Communists succeed in pulling off major victories in the north or in Cambodia,*

*Intelligence predictions of Communist "spectaculars" have dwelt on the capture of such places as Kontum City in the Central Highlands. Kontum seems too obscure a place to attract much attention. The Communists, who know what it takes to get headlines, are more likely thinking of taking Da Nang, Hue, Cam Ranh Bay, or Phnom Penh.

they might well be able to generate a sense of momentum in the southern lowlands.. If the southern ball gets rolling, the Saigon government could arrive at the brink of collapse even before US elections in November.

25X1

Approved For Release 2006/11/06 : CIA-RDP78T02095R000100090003-6

Page Denied

Next 3 Page(s) In Document Denied

Approved For Release 2006/11/06 : CIA-RDP78T02095R000100090003-6

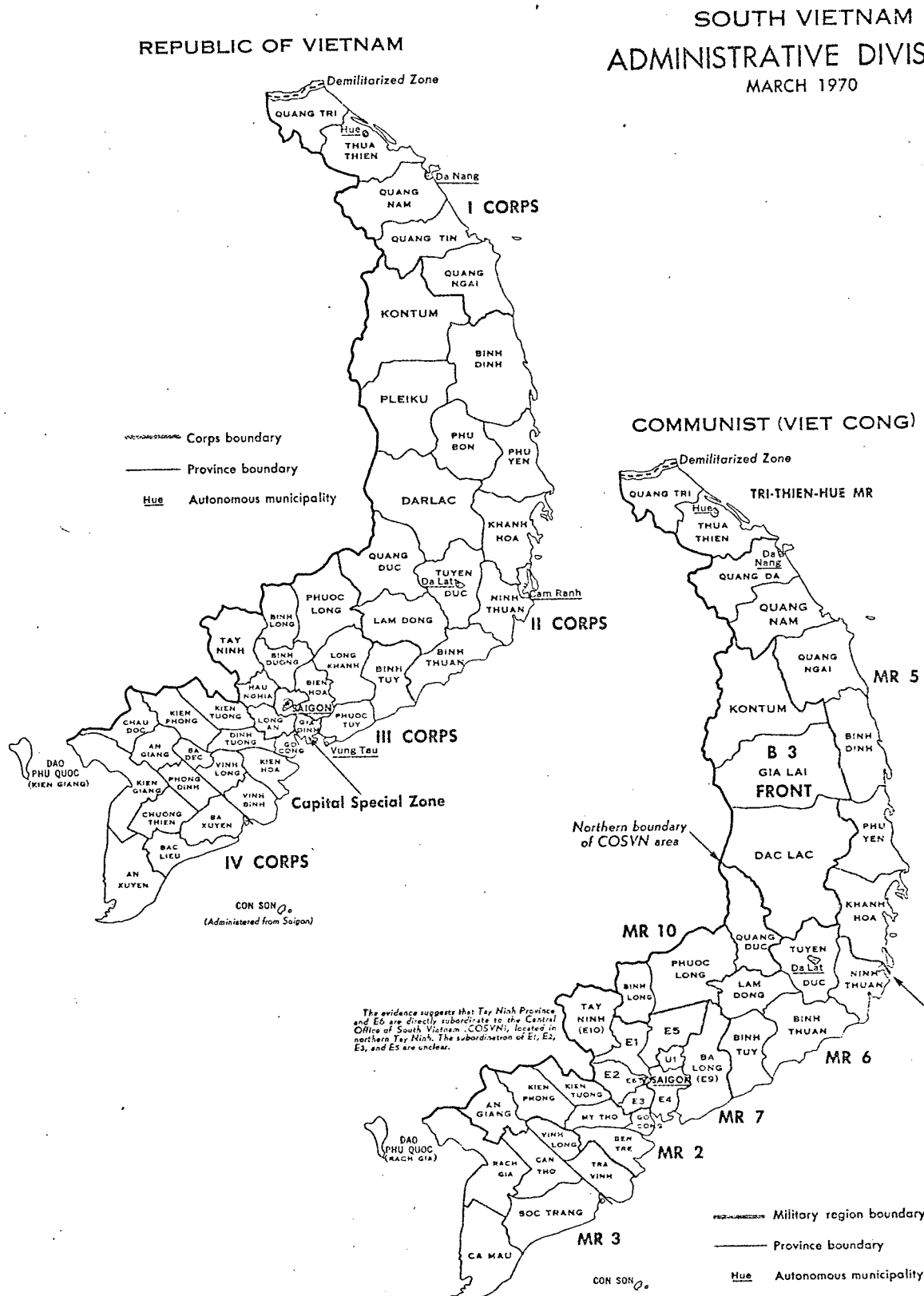


Figure 1